

Orienting for Sustainability:

A Resource for New Teacher Induction in Small Schools

Observations from
the third year of a
three-year study of
small high schools in
Washington State

Spring 2006

By
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The Small Schools Project began in September 2000, and is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The Project provides technical assistance to new small high schools and conversion schools. Assistance is provided in several ways: through our website (<http://www.smallschoolsproject.org>), professional development activities for educators and school board members, publications (generally available at no charge on our website), and consultant services.

In the spring of 2006, the Small Schools Project was working with 94 high schools, 68 of which were part of 18 sites converting from large comprehensive high schools to small, focused schools.

From 2001 to 2006, these schools received technical assistance in the form of school coaches from the Small Schools Coaches Collaborative. The Collaborative was a partnership of the Small Schools Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest Center, and the National School Reform Faculty.

The Seven Small Schools Study was a three-year study (fall 2003 to spring 2006) of seven small schools in Washington State that received reinvention grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This publication is based on the third year (2005–2006) of data collection. Six of these schools are located within recently converted large comprehensive schools; one school is an “already-small” school (under 400 students). Data collection included on-site observations, interviews, focus groups, and document review. For additional information about the study and to download other research reports, visit the Small Schools Project website at <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org>. The statements and opinions of interviewees quoted in this report represent the general tenor of the comments heard by the researchers. We welcome comments and suggestions to this report; we are eager to learn from the experiences of other high schools and technical assistance providers engaged in similar work.

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Introduction	1
Why Is New Teacher Induction Important in Small Schools?	1
New Teachers' Experiences in Small Schools	3
Orienting New Teachers in Small Schools	6
Hiring for "Fit".	6
Joining the Small School Community	7
Ongoing Support for New Teachers	11
Conclusion	15
Appendices	16
A Overview of New Teacher Orientation in Seven Small Schools . . .	16
B References	17
C Tools for Orienting New Teachers in Small Schools	
Questions for Reflection	19
New Teacher Induction Protocols	21

Small schools can anticipate changes in staff being a point of stress, whether it is due to administrator and teacher turnover or to growth in staff size. While teacher turnover is common in high schools, the issue for the redesigned small schools is how to integrate new staff members into the professional community. It is unclear what role small school staff members will have in making hiring decisions about new teachers and how well prepared they are to acculturate new administrators and teachers into the small school vision (Wallach & Gallucci, 2004).

When we wrote these words three years ago, the seven small schools in our study had only just begun their conversions into small schools. At the time, teachers and administrators noted both the challenges and the benefits of staff turnover. They remarked on the difficulty of losing key staff who had been involved in preparing for the conversion and the difficulty of bringing new staff into structures and policies that they had no voice in shaping. Some teachers and administrators noted that staff changes had benefited the conversion process, forcing remaining members to take on more responsibility thereby building a wider pool of leadership and infusing new life and energy into the process itself.

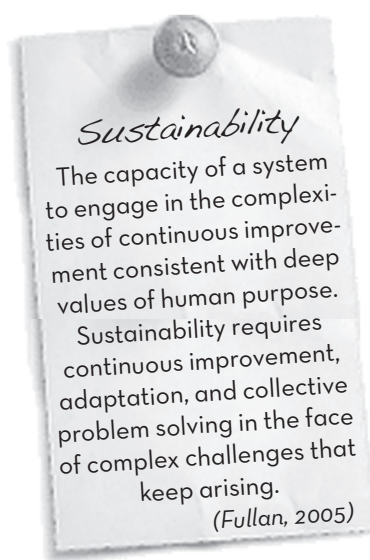
What we have learned in the past three years is that staff turnover remains a point of stress, a fact of life in small schools as well as large. We have also learned that staff turnover in small schools can have an enormous impact on a small school's ability to maintain a unique school culture and sustain efforts toward school redesign. For this reason, we wanted to examine how the seven small schools included in this ongoing study hire and orient their new teachers and what procedures and structures small schools use both to bring new teachers into the existing school culture and to benefit from what new teachers can contribute to school redesign efforts.

Why Is New Teacher Induction Important in Small Schools?

The issue of teacher attrition and turnover is a particularly difficult problem in small schools. The emphasis on personalization in small schools means that teachers often take on more of a counseling role, helping students in various ways, such as advisories, extra meetings with students during the school day, more phone calls to parents, etc. In addition, in most small schools teaching staffs handle many of the administrative tasks that used to be centralized. When small schools lose teachers or administrators, they lose more than a staff position. They lose an integral part of the administrative structure.

In the past three years, across the seven schools, teacher turnover has resulted in the loss of important leadership roles, the loss of continuity in the redesign process, and the loss of focus as key players in the planning for the redesign effort move on, leaving staff who have not been as heavily involved to carry on without a clear sense of direction or purpose. As a result, for some of the small schools in our study, the redesign effort stalled, and the sustainability of the changes already put into place is now uncertain.

Paying attention to new teachers is especially important in small schools because the redesign efforts in both conversion and already-small schools require sustained structural and instructional changes. New teachers, and how well they “fit” into the changing culture of the school, directly affect the ability of the small school faculty to work together in professional communities, the hallmarks of which are a common vision with clear expectations for adults and students, and mutual ac-




countability. Strong professional communities help sustain structural and instructional changes. Thus new teacher hiring and orientation relate directly to issues of sustainability in small schools. By sustainability, we mean not only how schools maintain the newly redesigned structures and practices but also how they continue to support, adapt, and expand these structures and practices as they work to accommodate the particular student populations they serve, within a framework of shifting resources and obligations. Sustainability is not about stasis but rather reflects the notion that underlying purposes and values in school redesign efforts are nurtured through intentional, thoughtful, and continuous changes that move toward the collective vision for the redesigned school.

The issue of how to invite new teachers to be part of a democratic process of shared decision making and mutual accountability without undoing the work that has already been done, or renegotiating all of the decisions that have already been made, further complicates the question of sustainability in small schools. In other words, *how do small schools sustain the changes they are making in areas such as school structure, schedule, instruction, and leadership, yet make room for new voices and ideas?*

In the following sections, we describe new teachers' experiences in small schools and then discuss the design structures that support the enculturation of new teachers and the pitfalls that can inhibit such efforts. To help small school administrators, teacher-leaders, and faculty think more systematically about new teacher induction, we have created a pullout section titled Tools for Orienting New Teachers in Small Schools. It includes questions for reflection and two protocols that can be used with small school faculty and staff (see Appendix C).

Research suggests that the quality of the induction experience appears to matter a great deal; informal, haphazard induction experiences have been associated with higher levels of attrition as well as lower levels of teacher effectiveness (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Findings from a recent large-scale study suggest that beginning teachers who were provided with mentors from the same subject field and who participated in collective induction activities, such as planning and collaboration with other teachers, were less likely to move to other schools and less likely to leave the teaching occupation after their first year of teaching (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Unfortunately, high quality induction experiences are not at all uniform in either large or small secondary schools; new teachers are frequently left in a tenuous position with little support from colleagues and few opportunities for professional development (Darling-Hammond & Sclan,



What the Research Says

1996). This results in large numbers of teachers leaving the profession early in their careers. Ingersoll's (2003) research suggests that new teacher attrition occurs at very high levels. Ingersoll found that:

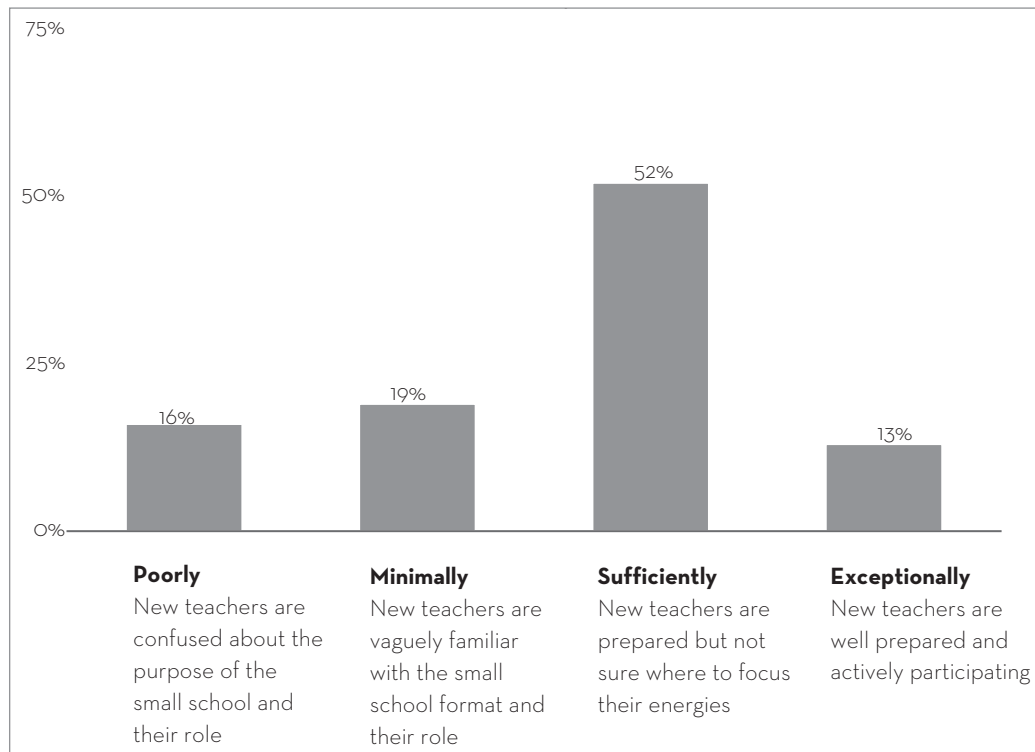
- fourteen percent of first-time teachers quit in the first year;
- within three years, 33 percent leave the profession; and,
- after five years, a point at which most teachers are just beginning to realize their fullest potential to benefit children's learning, half of all new teachers have left the profession.

In Washington State these numbers are less drastic, with three-quarters of novice teachers remaining in the Washington education system in some capacity five years later and nearly two-thirds of novice teachers remaining in the same district (Plecki et al. 2005).

¹ Survey and interview data were collected from a sample of all teachers and administrators participating in the Seven Small Schools Study.

Survey respondents¹ from our seven small schools told us how well they thought the orientation process at their small school prepares new teachers to fit into their small school culture and practices. The data shown in Figure 1 reveal that only 13 percent of the respondents feel that their orientation process for new teachers prepares teachers to actively participate in small school activities and decision making. Half of the respondents feel that new teachers are prepared but unfocused.

Figure 1: How Well Does the Orientation Process Prepare New Teachers?



These results suggest that more work needs to be done to prepare teachers for their roles in small schools. To begin this work, we talked to small school staffs about their current orientation processes and what new teachers think about their orientation to small schools.

² We use the term “building” to refer to the larger building-wide administrative structure and physical plant within which the small schools operate. A “building” is made up of several small schools with different visions and goals that share physical space within one large school building. In the case of the one already-small school in our study, “building” and small school are synonymous.

³ One school had no new teachers for the 2005-2006 school year.

We define “new” teachers as those teachers who are new to the small school although not necessarily new to teaching or to the building in which the small school is housed.² In the 2005–2006 school year, across the seven schools, there were sixteen teachers in their first or second year teaching in the particular small school.³ Seven of the sixteen were beginning teachers (in their first or second year), seven were veteran teachers but new to the small school, and two teachers were retire/rehire teachers who were hired to teach part time in the small school. In interviews, we asked them to tell us about how they were introduced to the culture of their small school and how they feel about teaching in a small school.

New teachers felt more welcomed and more a part of the school when they were given support in the form of helpful co-workers and an explanation of the structure and mission of the small school.

It was actually kind of nice because we had this entire orientation. ... This year actually seeing the formal introduction of “this is what [our small school] is,

these are the small learning communities, these are the ones you're going to be in, this is what it's about" was really kind of neat. Because I know a lot of teachers coming in were like, "Huh? Learning communities? What?" So it was kind of neat. They really explained it pretty well, about the themes for each one.

I wouldn't have done half as good a job as I did last year, [without] the support I had from my colleagues. The things that were really laid out for me were what the expectations for the classes were. So when kids get done with the class I'm teaching, "here are the expectations, here is how it fits into the rest of our program." [One teacher] actually gave me her lesson plans. ... I didn't have to worry about what I was going to teach. I just had to figure out teaching.

[At my small school] we meld well together. We laugh together. We eat together. That just makes so much difference. And not only is there personalization for the kids but for the teachers as well. Not only do we know our department, but we know our small school and I feel so strongly about any event ... that, you know, if there was a problem with a kid, we would work on it together. If there were problems personally, we would support each other about it. I have seen that happen.

A common focus, shared goals, and the ability to articulate these through clear expectations and structures already in place also helped new teachers feel confident about what they were doing.

We have a common goal and it's clearly stated and it's not just to the staff. It's clearly stated to the students so the students know that there are expectations as well as the staff.

Our teacher-leaders are just very driven and I think we look to them to ... they're very organized as well. ... We have a vision of what we want to do and our teacher-leaders really keep us on track. ... I think that the personalities of our teacher-leaders are very much, you know, "we have work to do, let's get it done and take advantage of this and work it."

Strong leadership and an attitude of inclusiveness from veteran teachers invited new teachers to participate in team meetings and decision-making activities.

Being the new person ... in the beginning I did not feel quite comfortable voicing a lot of my opinions. I kind of felt like more sitting back and listening and sort of taking in, doing everything that was expected of us to do. And I think now, as it's been several months going on there, I feel a little bit more confident, maybe, about saying different things or voicing my opinion about different things ... because we know each other a little better.

Interviewer: You said that being younger in a pretty experienced staff, you feel like you still have a voice within that group and that felt fairly unique to you.

New Teacher: I think so. And it's neat that I'm asked to be part of that, not just I need to find an opening and jump in, but they invite. It's invited. ... My input. As it is from everyone. ... I feel that it is valued just as much as someone else.

A group attitude of passion, drive, continuous learning, support for experimentation, collaboration, and group problem solving helped some new teachers feel like part of the team while also challenging them to be more rigorous and reflective about their teaching practice.

It's actually a little bit more rigorous than I expected. I thought that maybe this first year I could kind of learn on my own a little bit and kind of relax as far as what I was learning. But I feel like I'm being pushed—in a good way—but I feel like I'm definitely being pushed all the time to be doing better and better ... I'm a perfectionist myself so this might be something that I'm kind of putting on, because I see how well the other [small school] teachers

are doing, like just the great things that they're doing, and I kind of want to just step up a little bit to that.

I've been impressed that a lot of time is devoted to talking about teaching and learning and not just talking about sort of housekeeping kind of stuff... There is a lot of attention given to what actually happens in the classrooms, what we are striving for, you know, how we can be better teachers.

Individual teachers' "fit" with the theme and mission of the small school strengthened alignment with the culture and practices of the small school. Those teachers who were the most positive about their early experience in the small school had done extensive research on the small school itself and, in some cases, on the national small school redesign movement. In at least three cases, the new teachers chose their schools specifically because they were interested in "doing small schools stuff" and in being at a school in the midst of dynamic change.

Comments from teachers whose orientation experiences were less positive reflected, among other things, misalignment of expectations with the reality of the particular small school culture, feelings of isolation from colleagues, and lack of input into decisions affecting their work.


I was told before I came to the school that it was impossible to teach in isolation. I teach more in isolation here than I ever have, and than I ever hoped to. ... I just feel that I was told that this school was quite collaborative and that's ringing very false.

Within the [small school] I think there are certain people who are central to the leadership and to the decision making. I don't think that extends to me really. I don't feel like I need to be there [for discussions] because I don't have any input.

Some of the new teachers' dissatisfaction had to do with structural issues—for example, too many student crossovers so that the small school did not seem to have its own separate identity—and some had to do with the issue of turnover itself. A few schools lost their original leaders and many original faculty members, and thus lost continuity and the drive for change. Those remaining did not have the same levels of commitment to the redesign effort as the original planners, and new teachers found themselves entering a situation of low morale and unclear focus. One veteran teacher described the situation in this way:

There was a strong collaboration and cohesiveness among our staff, but with such a high turnover and new breed of teachers every year, it's kind of hard to keep that together. So I think we're battling that with how do we get everybody on board again. So culture-wise, I think the morale is pretty low at this point and I don't know how we're going to get that back up.

Based on new teacher comments about their orientation/induction experiences in small schools, we note the following factors that support new teacher enculturation and active participation in small schools (see sidebar).



Take Your Small School's Temperature
To what degree are these present in your small school?

Positive Factors for New Teacher Orientation to Small School Culture:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supportive co-workers/mentors
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Explanation of structure and mission of the small school
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Personalization among staff
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Common focus, shared goals
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clearly articulated expectations
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strong leadership (administrators, teacher-leaders)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Inclusive decision-making processes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Group attitude of passion and drive
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Collaboration among teachers, administrators, students, other stakeholders
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Individual "fit" in the small school
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Open learning stance that encourages experimentation and risk taking

When we think about orienting new teachers to small school philosophies, structures, and practices, we think of an ongoing process of enculturation that begins at the interview and continues throughout the first and sometimes second year of teaching at the small school. Given what new teachers have said about their experiences, we looked more closely at the specific formal and informal orientation methods small schools use to help new teachers adjust to the norms and practices of the school. In interviews with administrators and teachers, we asked about hiring practices, orientation sessions, mentors, and ongoing support of new teachers. A brief summary of the results and a snapshot of each school's orientation practices can be found in Appendix A. What follows is a discussion of specific design structures that support the enculturation of new teachers and the pitfalls that can inhibit such efforts.



Hiring for “Fit”

Six of the seven building administrators consider the small school theme or mission when hiring for those schools. Five of the seven building administrators involve small school teacher-leaders or other small school staff in the hiring process. Including small school staff in the hiring process introduces new teachers to the idea that the small schools are separate entities and provides direct initial contact with people who will be part of the professional community the new teacher will be entering.

[Orientation] activities need to go on within the small schools because that's one way you get buy-in, that's where you get camaraderie, togetherness within the small schools.

[During the interview] you talk about instructional practices that [the small school] believes [are important]. ... Teacher-leaders chime in big time on that.

Four of the seven building administrators we interviewed discussed the differences between hiring for large comprehensive high schools and hiring for small schools. Because of the small number of faculty in small schools and the increased attention to personalization between students and teachers, “fit” has come to mean more than subject-area expertise and classroom management abilities. Attitude, evidence of interest in the school's vision and goals, and the ability to work collaboratively have become part of what determines “fit” in small school hiring.

[At another large high school] we would hire for competence in the subject area and ability to interact with kids, connect with kids, those kinds of things. But I have to say it's much different [at the small school]. ... Education at the high school level's been really quite isolationist in nature and so you didn't worry about culture or teams, certainly, because your team may be a hundred people. Whereas now you're hiring for teams of ten to fifteen staff members. A team, let alone culture, is a very important question.

[The principal] has made it really clear ... when he goes into interviews [that] personality and attitude are the key things that are going to come out in getting somebody who is willing to work as a team member and work with the staff.

One administrator gave a clear example of how this works in practice:

We [the administrator, the teacher-leader, and representatives from the small school] have conversations as we go through the interview process about how that person seems like they fit. And sometimes it's just funny things. Like [one new teacher], when we hired him last year. We had this kind of little joke among ourselves before we went in to the interview, which was: “At what point in the interview should we tell the person that they're going to teach



⁴ For a complete discussion of a useful process for developing a vision, see Graham, J. (2005), *Stick your neck out*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

in a garage?” Because that’s not the usual classroom ... and there were a couple of people who you could see, they’d go “oh.” But when we asked [this new teacher] about it, he was like, “cool,” and then he started looking around the room and he was like, “oh, does it have a hydraulic lift? Imagine [what] you could do with that.” ... And I have to tell you [the subjects he could teach] became sort of secondary to this idea that this guy has got a mind that’s going to fit with this group. Because clearly he was smart enough. We can teach them, in some ways, how to teach [their subject matter]. ... But to teach somebody an attitude, that’s a whole different thing.

For small schools whose mission and purpose is commonly shared by most or all of the staff and is clearly articulated in written materials and daily practices, hiring for “fit” is an easier prospect for both new teachers and those doing the hiring. A clearly defined vision and set of goals helps new teachers make a more informed choice and gives administrators and hiring committees a clearer idea of what is needed. It also provides a basis upon which to create an appropriate orientation for new hires that prepares them to become effective and contributing members of the small school community.⁴

Joining the Small School Community

Once a teacher has been hired, the challenge becomes, How do we prepare this teacher to be an effective and contributing member of this small school? What does he or she need to know and how do we get that information across? The seven small schools in our study have responded to these questions in different ways.

We asked teachers and administrators to tell us the three most important pieces of information to convey to new teachers about their small school. In order of importance, survey respondents listed 1) the vision and goals of the small school, 2) expectations for teachers, and 3) expectations for students, clearly indicating a desire on the part of teachers and administrators to know what they are doing and how they will be expected to perform.

Additional comments on the survey noted that new teachers needed to be informed that “it’s not all rosy” and that new teachers should “ask questions, be open-minded.” One respondent wrote, “We need to somehow instill in the new hires that we are a team, and we are only as strong as our weakest link.” Interviews with administrators and others reflected a similar desire to inform new teachers about what they are getting into and the kind of collaborative approach to teaching and learning that is required in redesigned small schools. Two administrators detailed some of the components they considered important to get across to new teachers:

I think really getting a sense of the curricular decisions that small schools have made and understanding the role that collaboration plays within small schools. ... I think understanding how each small school works and how they do things. ... Staff meetings and expectations around using common planning time when it’s available, so there’s quite a bit of individual small school, I guess “politics” would be the best way to put it, that new teachers need to understand.

My big piece where I try to convey it is personalization. [I specifically ask] “How are you [about] contacting parents? Working with kids one-on-one after school? [Giving] help whenever they need it?” Those kinds of things.

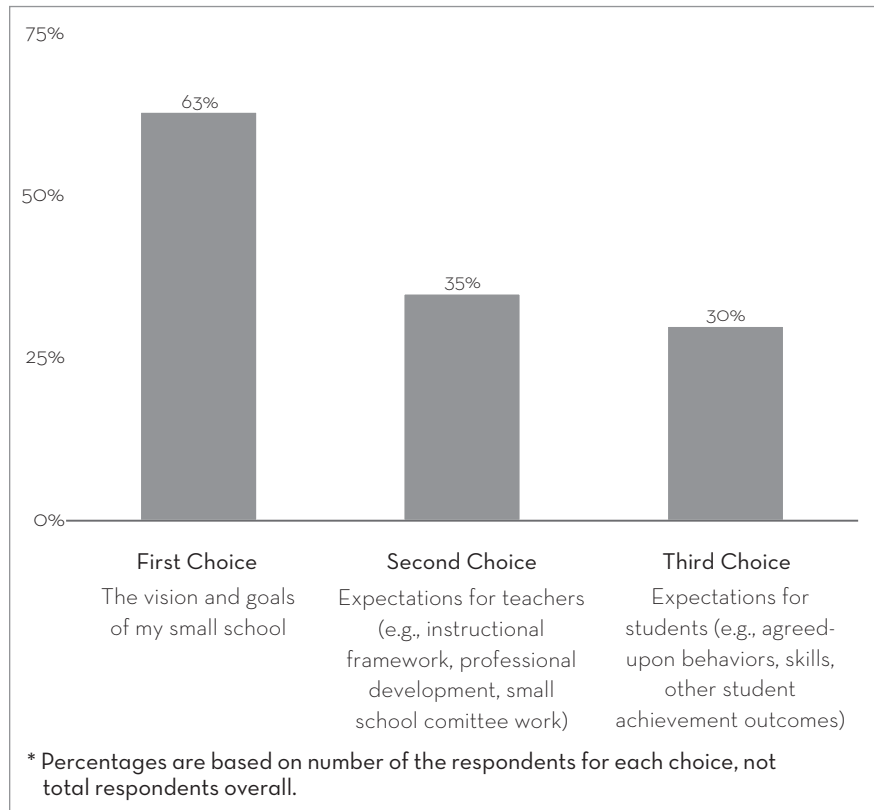
Take Your Small School's Temperature
To what degree are these present in your small school?

Design Structures to Support New Teacher Orientation in Small Schools: Hiring

- ☒ Include small school staff in the hiring process.
- ☒ Consider candidates’ attitudes toward change, ability to work collaboratively, skill in specific instructional strategies, and learning stance in relation to the particular small school in addition to subject-area expertise.
- ☒ Clearly articulate small school theme/focus/purpose and consider these in relation to any potential new teacher.
- ☒ Provide information online and elsewhere describing the small school redesign process and the political (national, state, district, building) context of the redesign effort.

ORIENTING NEW TEACHERS IN SMALL SCHOOLS

Figure 2: What Are the Three Most Important Pieces of Information to Convey to New Teachers?



The orientation procedures for new teachers, developed by each of the buildings within which the seven schools operate, vary widely. Five buildings hold summer retreats for all teachers, run by administrators, during which time new teachers learn about the small school themes and practices. Some small schools use this summer retreat to set small school professional development goals, build professional community, and do curriculum planning for the coming year. New teachers who attended these summer retreats found them very useful in preparing for working in the small school, especially when the content of the retreat included discussions of core values within the small school. Here is one example of a summer retreat:



The [big] school invited everybody, all the staff, all the new hires, and everybody to the staff retreat in August. ... That was where they kind of inundated you with “this is what [the small school] is. This is how we work together.” You know, “This is what we’re all about.” And then we create a list of norms for each of our meetings so everybody understands the rules and then just making sure that everybody has a chance to talk and speak their mind on stuff while we are there.

One building conducts its new teacher orientation in two-hour chunks over the course of the school year. This transforms the one-shot information-giving format into an ongoing schedule of discussions meant to disseminate information but also to address new teachers’ concerns directly throughout the year. Although this is a building-wide orientation run by building administrators, small school issues are discussed.

We usually do a new teacher orientation at the start of the year, but this was a ... six-hour block. We had two-hour chunks over the course of the year. The first one we did sort of the history [of the conversion], the overview [of the small schools movement and the themes of each of the small schools in the

building], gave them some literature to read. ... And then from there it was pretty much a teacher-generated agenda. So, “what don’t you understand, what haven’t we been clear about, what are your frustrations, what are you curious about, what don’t you get?”

Three buildings hold separate orientations to the particular small school for new teachers. These orientations are generally less formal and often include one-on-one meetings with the teacher-leader who explains the norms and processes of the group. In addition, new teachers meet various staff members and attend small school meetings where they get a sense of the professional community and the daily interactions of staff.

We just did our own in-house orientation with them [new teachers] and gave them an opportunity to spend time with staff from their small school, our classified staff... [we introduced the new teachers to] building procedures that we want them to go through and [made sure that the new teachers] understand that in our building there’s kind of an additional layer of stuff that you have to work through with the small schools.

There was a [small school] kick-off assembly, so that was a place where we were all introduced to the culture of the school in a way. ... My administrator did a lot to let me know what [the small school] was about when I came in, introducing me around to the different staff and then the staff would tell me their points of view. So that was really my main introduction.

Other buildings are even less formal about orientation, with some new teachers only meeting with the small school teacher-leader before the school year begins and others simply expected to pick up an understanding of the group norms by attending meetings and participating in activities.

At the small school level... there is kind of an induction. Teacher-leaders would be involved as well as the assistant principal for that [small school]. We would be foolish not to tell them the vision, the parameters, the goals, and the focus on teaching and learning of that [small school], so they are given an orientation informally, I would say, once it gets to the [small school].

I don’t know of anything that we do specifically for new teachers, other than they’re there at the staff meetings, they see us talk. ... But whether we go out of our way to say “here’s our values”—I don’t think we necessarily do that. We do, I guess, by prioritizing, “what’s on our list this year, what can we accomplish as goals?”

In particular [the teacher-leader] was insistent upon the fact that I meet with her before the school year started so we could talk about some common goals for our students as they come up through high school. And [the teacher-leader] kind of explained to me some of the philosophies of the [small school]. Also in some of our department meetings I’ve gotten a better feel for what we are trying to do.

New teachers are grateful for this support from individual colleagues, but some feel as if they are constantly playing “catch-up” and never quite gain the sense of purpose and context that more formalized orientation processes offer. At least three of the small schools provide written materials to new teachers that explain the history and mission of the small school.

We made up a staff handbook that we update every year that has just our history and our protocols and our norms and our sort of ideas and our mission statement and thoughts about Essential Questions and things like that. Just to sort of educate [the new teacher].

While these materials are helpful, not all new teachers find them useful without also seeing the daily routine in action. As with any learning situation, retention and understanding increase when new learning is applied to an authentic context.

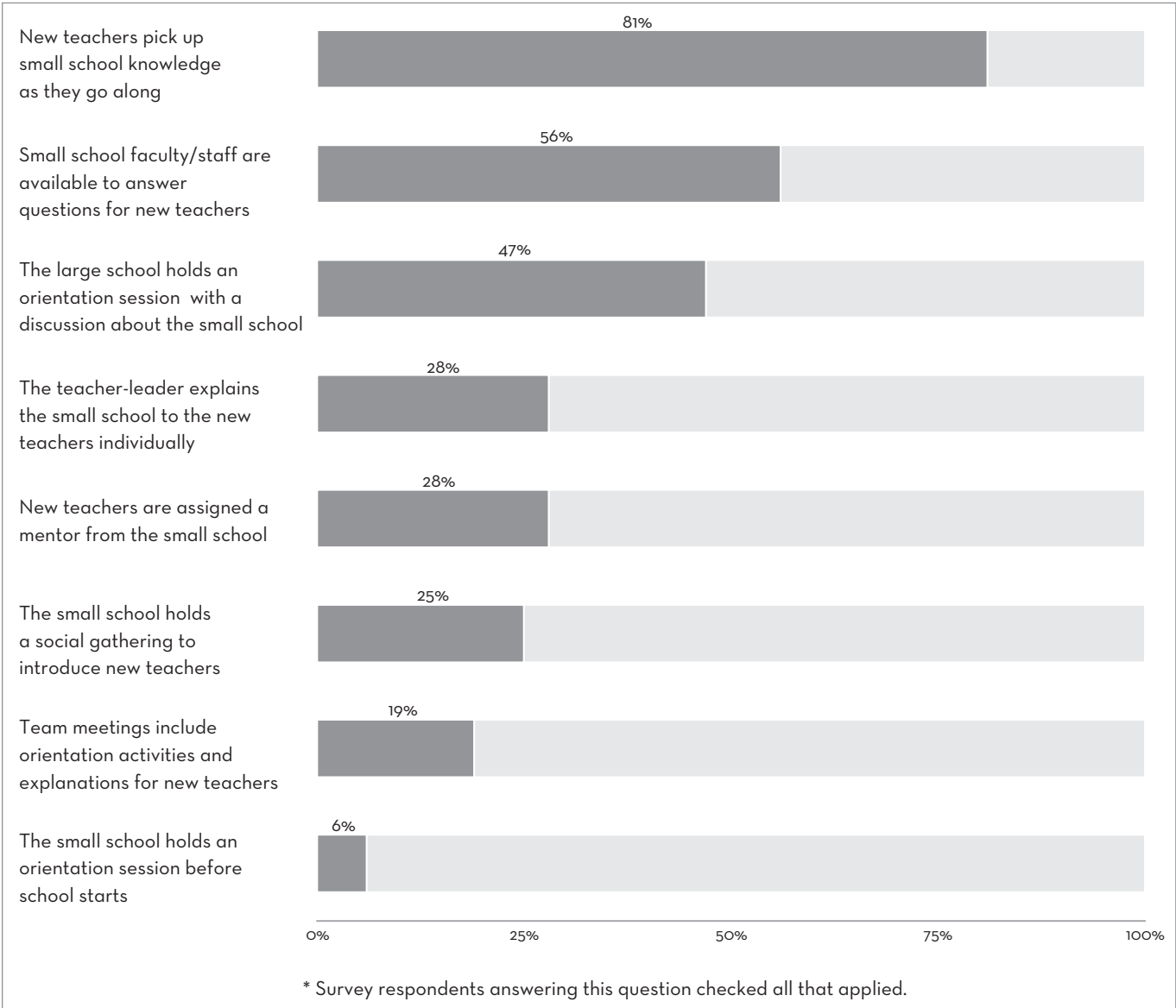


ORIENTING NEW TEACHERS IN SMALL SCHOOLS

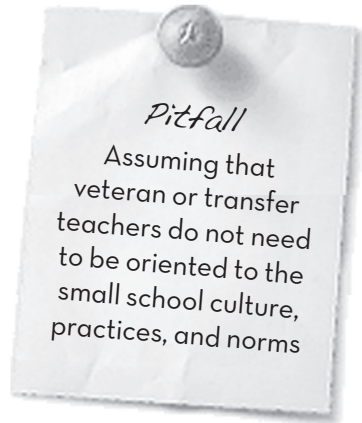
It’s written out in the materials, in the planner, on the website, and all that. So I’ve read all of that. But it seems a little nebulous still in my mind, so I’m still trying to nail that down and to see how it actually is actualized, to see what actually happens because of that vision. I’m still not real clear on that.

Figure 3 offers a glimpse of the various processes for orienting new teachers to small schools and shows which processes are used most frequently.

Figure 3: What Is the Process for Orienting New Teachers?*



On the whole, if orientations for new teachers happen, the data indicate that these sessions are primarily organized at the building level. Many of these orientations offer important information to the new teachers about resources available to them, outline expectations of their work, and describe the nature of the teaching situation in which they will find themselves. However, building-level orientations, when offered without a corresponding small school orientation, can be problematic because they cannot offer the kind of focus on individual small school culture and opportunities to assimilate into that culture that small school orientations can offer. In addition, building-level orientations cannot always take



Take Your Small School's Temperature
To what degree are these present in your small school?

Design Structures to Support New Teacher Orientation in Small Schools: *Joining the small school community*

- ☒ Small school and building administrators agree upon what new teachers need to know to teach in a particular small school.
- ☒ Clearly articulate small school vision, goals, and expectations for teachers and students to new teachers.
- ☒ Accompany written materials describing the small school with discussion or personal explanation and examples.
- ☒ Small school staff conducts intentional, formalized orientation sessions, focused on the particular small school, for ALL new teachers.

into account unique factors in small schools that need to be addressed as a teacher joins the staff.

One unique factor that small schools must contend with, and that building-level orientations do not address directly, is the induction of veteran teachers to the small school culture. While these teachers are not new to the profession, they are new to the culture of the particular small school. They may also be new to the different kinds of demands that small schools place on teachers, such as requiring more collaboration with colleagues, more attention to relationships with students inside and outside of class, and, in some schools, an intense focus on examining instructional practice. For veteran teachers used to operating within the relative isolation and anonymity of large high schools, these can be very big changes, and require orientation and support. Often however, small school staff assume that veteran teachers, especially those transferring from within the same building, already understand or will be able to quickly pick up the particular requirements the small school places on teachers.

Teachers who transfer between schools within a building report that they have more difficulty with the transition because their colleagues assume that they are already informed about the small school they have entered.

I think the people in [the small school] just took for granted that I would pick it up as I went. Because I didn't really get sat down right and [told] "this is what [the small school] is all about and this is our mission." You know they didn't give me the packet that I'm sure everybody got. I would have to say that my transition into the [small school] was a little bit weak support-wise for that.

Because both [new teachers] were here [in the building], we assumed that they would know [about the small school they were transferring to]. But they didn't. They didn't know the culture.

These data highlight the need for orientation of *all* new teachers to the specific small school mission, norms, and practices, regardless of where they are coming from. The data also suggest that a more focused and intentional induction process might better prepare new teachers to become more active members of their small school communities by alleviating some of the confusion and misunderstanding that can be generated by ad hoc orientations. We consider the intentionality of the orientation process further at the end of the next section.

Ongoing Support for New Teachers

One administrator, when asked about the orientation process for new teachers, commented that he did not think "the orientation process itself is as big a change as the ongoing support piece." Because small schools are engaged in a redesign process that ultimately leads to a shift in traditional values, beliefs, expectations, assumptions, behaviors, and relationships around teaching and learning (essentially a culture shift), the orientation or induction process for new teachers requires ongoing attention to sustain such a shift. The seven small schools in our study provide ongoing support for new teachers to varying degrees through individual relationships, including mentoring, and the development of professional community among the small school staff.

All seven schools in our study assign mentors to all new teachers according to district mandate. The building principal generally assigns paid mentors according to subject area and/or small school membership. In most cases, when asked to whom they turn for support (especially for day-to-day advice on classroom practices and practical and logistical matters), new teachers list their mentors. In small schools with strong professional communities, new teachers also list other teachers and administrators who support their efforts to develop their practice and understand the small school structure and expectations. In small schools where the professional community is not as strong, new teachers left to fend for themselves seek out individual colleagues for help on their own.



The district has a mentorship program for new teachers and these are teachers that are in the building and hopefully we'll try to pick one that's in each of the [small schools]. In some cases when we can't, we try to get, as long as they're in the same department. But we do try to get them in the [small school] first.

Probably the difference [in mentoring between large high schools and small schools] is we've had academic discipline mentors [in large schools]. Now we're also able to have small school team mentors with them [new teachers]. ... We're always amazed at how much support our new staff wants and therefore probably needs.

New teachers feel supported when there is a lot of collaboration and teamwork among small school faculty. New teachers have significantly increased opportunities for interacting with their colleagues, gathering information and participating in decision-making activities in small schools with frequent small school staff meetings, common lunch and planning periods, and even common teachers' lounges where staff gather informally.

Ms. P was new, not a new teacher, but new to [the small school], and she stepped up and she said, "Hey, I would be willing to run the [small school] student council" that we created this year because she had experience with leadership. ... And so she stepped up right away. She was willing to jump in there. Part of that's her personality, but I think part of that is the community that we created there.

At a few of the schools in our study, new teachers report that while the structures—for example, regular staff meetings, common lunch times, physical proximity to other staff in their small school—exist, they do not always result in ongoing support for teachers, new or veteran, or in effective sharing of the small school vision. Staff meetings are not well attended and no formal effort is made to address questions from new teachers in at least two of the seven schools. In addition, in some instances a few people dominate discussions and new teachers do not feel that their input is welcome.



I think that the leadership in our [small school] presents the solution to a problem and we either agree or disagree. But there are no alternate solutions, you know? So it's like, "This is the solution. What do you guys think?" "Well here's some positives and here's some negatives." "Okay, well we'll deal with the negatives, let's go with it." So I'm definitely willing to not say that felt like it was a democratic process. ... We're [new teachers] not involved in [the] lower process of leadership within the [small school], and we don't really seem to have any influence because we're new and we don't know how the [small school] works.

The frustration I hear from people with regard to the [small school] is when they ask questions it becomes, "You weren't here four years ago when we did this," or "We decided we're doing it this way and if you don't like it that way well..."



I think there were some days they set aside to educate the new staff about what's been going on, but I think that's not the same as being involved in the work. I mean it's completely different than the people that actually sat through and struggled with it, had all the hard debates and all that stuff, bought into this whole process.

These comments highlight the tension between efforts to bring new teachers into the small school culture and the need for a democratic process that involves all teachers in the continuing redesign effort and gives all participants a feeling of ownership over decisions that affect their working environment. Navigating this tension is a fluid, dynamic, and evolving process. In order to sustain a culture shift and move forward with redesign efforts, small schools cannot continually revisit decisions already made. New teachers must be enculturated into the norms and mores of the small school as they exist currently.

At the same time, sustaining the small school culture also requires small school staffs to adapt to new pressures and challenges as they arise. New teachers, with new ideas, energy, and enthusiasm can help address new challenges and provide an opportunity for small schools staff to clarify the vision and goals of the small school as they explain them to the newcomers. Our research shows that when small schools are *intentional* about their new teacher orientation and support processes—when they focus as a team on what needs to be imparted and create specific processes for how to do that—the tension between enculturation and democratic decision making can be used to great advantage. A few of the seven small schools in our study became more intentional about their ongoing support process over the last three years as a result of developing their professional community, and of focusing on issues of instruction and distributed leadership.

For example, one small school staff, in thinking through an orientation process for new teachers, discovered that they were unclear themselves about their identity as a school. This school used the impetus of having to provide an orientation for new teachers to identify and clarify for themselves their curricular goals and structure. Preparing new teachers to become part of the professional community allows the entire community to reflect on its values, expectations, and practice and adjust itself accordingly to the changing demands of school redesign work. This reflection did not undo the hard work of the prior three years but helped the small school staff take stock of how far it had come and gain clarity about where it needed to go.

In another example of an intentional and collective process, the small school staff as a whole discussed whether or not a new teacher should get an advisory during his first year. Because of the configuration of advisories in that particular small school and because other teachers did not want to give up students with whom they had already developed relationships, the staff as a whole, including the new teacher, decided to have the new teacher work with the advisory committee, “to serve that and help provide activities for people on certain days.” This collective decision honored the advisory structure the small school had already put into place but made room for the new teacher to participate in the structure and in the decision-making process.

Small schools staffs agree that intention is key. When asked what they would change about the support process for new teachers in their small school, survey respondents noted that the process should be more intentional and more focused on the small school.



Take Your Small School's Temperature

To what degree are these present in your small school?

Design Structures to Support New Teacher Orientation in Small Schools: Ongoing support

- ☒ Set aside time during team meetings for questions from new teachers and for filling in background/history of issues.
- ☒ Assign mentors specifically from within the small school.
- ☒ Provide opportunities for new teachers to participate regularly in decision-making activities.
- ☒ Members of the professional community maintain a flexible stance toward questions and new ideas.

Currently our process is more informal. I believe ... that we need to have an intentional process in place. As more of our “founders” leave us, this intentional process needs to be in place. The history, vision, [and] goals of the school need to be included in the process.

In interviews some teachers and administrators also highlighted a need to make the support process for new teachers more thoughtful and more focused on the small school.

The orientation needs to [include] ongoing activities. ... I’m hearing that it needs to go on within the [small schools] as well, because that’s one way you get buy-in. That’s where you get camaraderie, togetherness within the [small schools]. ... And after we do the initial orientation, now [small schools] need to do their thing and keep activities going.

I think you have to be intentional ... school-wide, as leadership, as a district. Whoever’s in charge has to say, “This is what we’re doing.” And the focus is on that and not, “we’re doing a little bit of this, a little bit of that, and a little bit of that,” and in the end nothing gets done. So like, how do you become intentional about getting people involved?

Sustaining changes in small schools requires commitment and buy-in from teachers new to the small school and from pre-existing staff. New teachers must not only be informed about the changes but also be included in discussions and decision making about the ongoing redesign effort. Change is not static and cannot be implemented once and then frozen in time. Staff turnover, and the resulting need for new staff induction, offers small schools an opportunity for ongoing reflection about the changes they have made and are making in their schools. It also offers an opportunity to revisit the core values, mission, and goals of the school to make sure they are still relevant to the changing population of students and staff and that they are still guiding the small school decision making in ways that move the school toward the vision it has set for itself. This is the essence of sustainability in the midst of change.

Overview of New Teacher Orientation in Seven Small Schools

The chart below offers a snapshot of each of the seven study schools and their new teacher orientation practices. Note that each of the schools in the study was assigned a pseudonym.

An Overview of New Teacher Orientation in Redesigned Small Schools 2005-2006

	Elm	Alder	Fir	Chestnut	Cedar	Hemlock	Birch
Grade levels served in 2005-2006	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-12	9-10
Number of students & percent of building enrollment	315 (19%)	291 (17%)	150 (100%)	227 (15%)	394 (20%)	394 (52%)	200 (10%)
Number of teacher FTE	11.6	12.5	18.5	8	16	14.8	20
Number of teachers	14	15	19	10	17	17	20
Number of new teachers in the small school 2005-2006	3	2	0	2	1	2	5
Does the teacher-leader have release time or compensation?	Stipend	.5 FTE release	*	Stipend	Stipend/ Extra prep	-	Stipend
Is there a summer retreat or pre-school-year orientation for teachers in the building?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is there a separate formal orientation for the small school?	No	1 st year only	*	Yes	No	No	Yes
Are mentors assigned from within the small school if possible?	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Is the small school's theme/mission considered when hiring new teachers?	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Are teacher-leaders involved in the hiring process for new teachers?	Yes	Yes	*	Yes	Yes	No	No
Are printed materials about the small school given to new teachers?	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

* Fir is an already-small school

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Questions for Reflection on New Teacher Orientation in Your Small School

These questions will help you think through your own new teacher orientation process. The first section (Overall) asks broad questions about your small school's process for orienting teachers and the kind of data you collect about new teachers' experiences in your small school. The following sections (Hiring, Joining the Small School Community, Ongoing Support for New Teachers) ask questions about specific aspects of the orientation process. We encourage you to use these questions to begin and to continue a dialogue with your small schools staff about new teacher induction in your small school.

Overall

- What are our goals in orienting new teachers? What is most important for new staff to know?
- What is our process for orienting new teachers?
- How will we ensure that new teachers understand and buy in to our building and small school culture?
- Do we gather data from teachers about their experience as new teachers in our building and small school? What do we do with this information?
- Do we conduct exit interviews with departing teachers to find out how the interview, induction, and ongoing support for teachers could be improved? What have we learned from this information?

Hiring

- Who should be part of our hiring process?
- Who should lead the hiring process?
- How do we define our small school? What is our focus/purpose/theme?
- What qualities will we look for in a candidate that will support our small school culture? How do the candidates' values align with our small school culture and values?
- How are these qualities made clear in job postings?
- How do we provide information about our small school to candidates? Is it accurate? Is it updated? Attractive? Accessible to all?
- How do we resolve issues of competition for new teachers among several small schools in a building? What is our process for deciding how new teachers are assigned within the building?

Joining the Small School Community

- What do new teachers in our small school need to know to become active members of the professional community? Do we all (administrators, small school staff) agree on this?
- How do we teach new teachers what they need to know about our small school? What structures and processes do we use to orient new teachers to our small school? Are these structures and processes in alignment with our small school values, expectations, common practices? Are they in line with what we know about how adult learners learn best?
- Have we considered that all new teachers, even those that transferred from within the building or are veteran teachers from elsewhere, need to be oriented to our way of doing things? How are we addressing these new-but-not-new teachers' needs?
- Who should lead the orientation process?
- When/how often should orientations take place?



Ongoing Support for New Teachers

- How do we communicate with one another and the rest of our professional community? Are new teachers included in our communication?
- How do we get to know our new teachers personally and professionally? Do we have social gatherings?
- How do we make time for new teachers during our meetings? During the school day? How are we helping new staff participate in our learning community?
- How do we make sure new teachers know the history and background of the issues we are discussing?
- How do we assign mentors to new teachers? How do mentors help new teachers understand the small school context and culture?
- How are new teachers involved in the decisions we make? Do we include new teachers by giving them opportunities to take responsibility for new programs, leading meetings, developing activities, or other things?
- As a staff and a professional community, are we open to new perspectives and ideas? Are we willing to consider changing the way we do things?
- What is our process for considering new ideas without opening everything up for renegotiation? What decisions are we willing to reconsider?



New Teacher Induction Protocols

Welcoming new teachers into decision-making processes in the small school can be a daunting prospect for teacher-leaders and administrators. If not done thoughtfully and carefully, opening up discussions about past decisions or inviting input from new teachers who do not yet fully understand the vision, norms, and practices of the small school can lead to conflict and paralysis, stalling the forward movement of the redesign effort. Teachers and leaders in small schools need to find effective ways to share their small school culture with new teachers and make room for new perspectives and ideas that new teachers bring with them.

To provide some guidance on how to facilitate these kinds of conversations, we supply the following protocols designed to:

- Facilitate in-depth understanding and exploration of the new teacher induction data presented in this text
- Support personalization and collaboration among all staff members
- “Cement” the common focus and shared vision of the small school

These protocols are modifications of current protocols from the National School Reform Faculty (see web address below). We have modified them to address the enculturation of new teachers to a small school setting. It may be useful to note the suggestions for timing of these protocols. (Some protocols would be more helpful for the beginning of the school year, for example.)

1. *Three Levels of Text* (Before school year begins or whenever planning occurs)
2. *Looking Back and Looking Forward* (Beginning of school year)

* A good resource for teachers new to the use of protocols is *The power of protocols: An educator's guide to better practice*, (McDonald, J.P., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E.C., 2003). Other protocols and suggestions for using them can be found in the Small Schools Project publication, *Planning resources for teachers in small high schools*, (Summer 2003), available at <http://www.smallschoolsproject.org> and at the National School Reform Faculty website <http://www.nsrffharmony.org>.

† We have incorporated some of the guidelines for protocols from the National School Reform Faculty.

Some Reminders

These protocols are designed to build the safety necessary for taking risks and learning together. New teachers may feel hesitant to share at first, especially with people they don't know very well yet. Teachers who have been in the small school should resist the temptation to “rush in” with advice and suggestions. Veteran staff must assume that teachers new to the small school have a set of experiences and viewpoints that are equally valuable to the growth and learning of the professional community.

Each protocol* demands that participants follow norms for safe and effective dialogue (see guidelines that follow). Protocol facilitators must insist on allowing enough time for effective processing and debriefing at the end of each protocol.

Guidelines for Protocol Dialogue†

Guidelines safeguard teachers who put some of their weaknesses and/or ideas “on the table.” These guidelines also make it safe to ask challenging questions of each other.

Effective dialogue has these dimensions:

1. Ensures balance of power between participants
2. Affirms divergent thinking



3. Supports relationships
4. Transforms participants—both “more” and “less” experienced
5. Transforms the community

Roles

1. It is essential for good protocol dialogue that a “balance” between participants is created. People need to feel safe to share, open up to one another, and trust their colleagues. It is critical, therefore, that for the purposes of the protocol, participants set aside any professional roles that would cause colleagues to perceive them as the “expert with all the answers.” Participants acknowledge a “level playing field” during the protocol.

Airtime

2. Participants must adhere to guidelines about when to speak and when to listen. Those who are not presenting need time to listen carefully to the entire presentation without having to quickly generate questions or comments. Presenters need time to simply listen and write (during feedback time) without having to think about providing eye contact or immediately responding to comments or feedback.
3. Don’t be afraid of silence. Learn to listen. Worry less about what to say. Let all participants do the “saying.”
4. Abiding by the time limits makes it less likely that a small number of individuals will dominate the airtime.

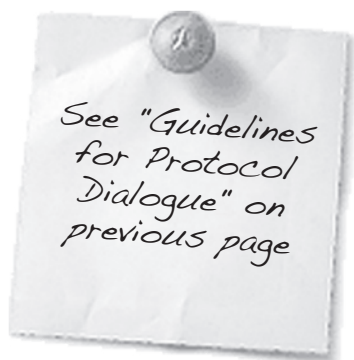
Feedback

5. Participants need to be considerate and intentional about the framing of their language. Feedback can be heard much better if it’s expressed in the form of a question or with some qualification and a measure of humility, e.g., “I wonder if...” rather than “I think you should...” This intentional framing of language allows participants to fully take advantage of the possibilities created by divergent thinking.
6. Avoid the temptation to “fix” individuals or situations. Careful framing of feedback allows a participant to demonstrate that he/she doesn’t know the context of the situation well enough to tell the presenter what they should do. Self-monitoring of tone of voice and body language is important to maximize learning.

Confidentiality

7. Respect norms of confidentiality. Each participant must keep the details about students and sensitive situations that are shared within a protocol confidential.





Three Levels of Text Protocol

Purpose: To deepen understanding of a text and explore implications for participants' roles in orienting new teachers to the small school.

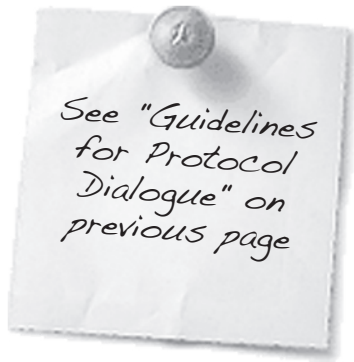
Facilitation: Stick to the time limits. Each round takes up to five minutes per person in a group. Emphasize the need to watch airtime during the brief "group response" segment. This protocol can be used as a prelude to a text-based discussion or by itself.

Roles: Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

Process:

1. Sit in a circle and identify a facilitator/timekeeper.
2. If participants have not done so ahead of time, have them read the text and identify a passage (and one or two alternative passages) that they feel may have important implications for their work. (You may want to divide up the text among participants so that all sections of the piece are covered.)
3. Do one to three rounds. A round consists of—
 - One person using up to two minutes to:
 - LEVEL 1: Read aloud the passage she/he has selected.
 - LEVEL 2: Say what she/he thinks about the passage (interpretation, connection to past experiences, etc.).
 - LEVEL 3: Say what she/he sees as the implications for her/his work.
 - The group responds (for a TOTAL of up to two minutes) to what has been said and then moves on to the next round.
4. After all rounds have been completed, debrief the process. Based on all of the comments, consider the implications for improving new teacher orientation at your small school.





Looking Back and Looking Forward

Purpose: To support personalization and collaboration among staff members and to share both new and returning teachers' thinking around mission, goals, and small school identity. (This protocol works well as an "icebreaker" in fall retreats, or anytime you are introducing new teachers to the small school.)

Facilitation: (*Five minutes*) Facilitator introduces the protocol by sharing the purpose and procedure. He/she reviews norms for safe and effective dialogue.

Roles: Facilitator/timekeeper; participants

Process:

1. (*Ten minutes*) Participants prepare for the activity by writing their reactions to three questions. The writing should include informal thoughts and ideas that will "hold their thinking" for the dialogue that will follow. Choose three questions that will "cement" the common focus and shared vision of the small learning community, while including the thoughts and ideas of new teachers. Here are some suggestions for possible question prompts dealing with new teacher induction:
 - Post the small school's mission statement. "What does this statement mean to you?"
 - Post your small school's instructional framework, focus, or area of need (e.g., the 3 Rs [rigor, relevance, and relationships], a stance or statement about literacy that the small school has adopted, the goal of advisory, etc.). "What is your understanding of this statement?"
 - Ask the group to think about their past experiences in [small school] (returning teachers), or what they've been told so far about [small school] (new teachers). "What do you believe separates our small school from the other small schools in our building?"
 - "What are your hopes for our small school this year?"
 - "How could your colleagues best support your efforts this year?"
 - "How do you best learn with your colleagues?"
2. (*Three minutes per person—six-minute rounds*) Line up in two circles, one inside the other. People in the inner circle should face out and people in the outer circle should face in. Everyone should have a partner. Facilitator reads question one and keeps track of time, letting people know when to begin and when to switch. Each person talks for three minutes without interruption. Each partner makes eye contact and may nod to indicate listening, but does not ask questions or offer ideas. If a person finishes before time is called to switch, enjoy the silence! Often the best ideas emerge when you dig deeper for more ideas. Be patient, even if it feels awkward.
3. After round one, the lines moves in opposite directions so each participant is paired with a new person. Continue the procedure in #2 with question two and then three.
4. (*Five minutes*) After all rounds are completed, debrief the process. Facilitator asks, "What came up for you in this discussion? What differences do we see among us? What do we agree on? Are there things we need to work on? How will we do that?"